Questions & Answers from the
October 13, 2011 Reporting Web Conference

Topic: POW 101 Training for State Users

Q: Please explain more about making sure new Planned Programs added to a 2012 Plan of Work are reflected correctly on the 2011 Annual Report.
A: In FY11, states were required to include the five NIFA Priority Areas as Planned Programs in their 2012-2016 Plan of Work updates (due April 15, 2011). Because of this, many states manually added planned programs to their POWs and/or edited the names and data in already existing PPs to reflect the new priority area(s). While states expect to report against these new PPs in this year's Annual Report (the 2011 AR due April 1, 2012), the states that manually made these changes to their 2012 POW will find that the changes are not reflected in the 2011 AR that has been automatically generated by the POW software. This is because ARs are generated off of the POW of the same FY. Thus, the 2011 ARs for all states reflect whatever Planned Programs were in the 2011 POW that they submitted in April of 2010. In order for states to report on the Planned Programs that they submitted as part of their 2012 POW, they will need to manually update their 2011 AR in order to reflect those changes. To do this, users must choose to "edit" the 2011 AR listed on their POW home screen. They must then go to "Planned Programs" and click the "Add previously unplanned program" link at the bottom left-hand corner of the screen. For further direction, please consult training slides 63 through 65 here: http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/reporting/planrept/pdf/pow_101_training.pdf.

Q: Where can I find updates and policy reminders, as well as important decision documents on the AREERA website?
A: The first subtitle on the AREERA website is titled "News, Updates and Policy Documents." The bulleted list under this heading contains the most up-to-date resources for POW users.
http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/reporting/planrept/plansofwork.html

Q: What does NIFA do with state-defined output measures and state-defined outcomes (i.e. how are they used in reporting)?
A: NIFA relies on state-defined output measures to determine the effectiveness of programs being funded by the four formula funds covered under the POW reporting process. These output measures are the cornerstone of the evaluation process, and they undergird the logic model on which the Plan of Work data collection process is based. Evaluation is extremely important to the states and to NIFA, as we all want to know how programs are doing. Are they effective? What impact are they having on local and state communities? Such output measures also provide data and information to support the broader outcome statements made in the state-defined outcomes section. A general assumption can be made that without concrete evaluation data (as defined by the output measures), then strong outcome

statements with quantifiable data cannot be made. NIFA is required to report to OMB and Congress to show evidence of past performance of these formula funds. Without strong outcome statements (and the evaluation data that supports them), NIFA would have a difficult time showing such evidence of positive results and past performance.

Q: What is the direct URL for the National Outcomes & Indicators document that was published on the NIFA website in August 2011?
A: http://www.nifa.usda.gov/business/reporting/planrept/pdf/11_out_ind_grants_v6.pdf

Q: Are NIFA's 5 Priority Areas (also known as Challenge Areas) firm? Will they be changed at any point?
A: The 5 Priority Areas as they currently stand remain strong areas of focus for NIFA, and there has been no indication from leadership that they will change in the near future. However, it is important to remember that goals do change in organizations as leadership changes, so it is possible that the mandate of including the 5 Priority Areas as Planned programs in the POW could be removed. We wish to point out, however, that while the nomenclature of the priority areas could change, the topic areas themselves are quite obviously broad areas of interest across the entire country. Researching nutrition/exercise and ways to prevent childhood obesity and the strong push for finding alternative sources of sustainable energy, just to name a few, are probably not going away any time soon, so they are important things to be talking about in the POW.

Q: Where can I access information from this training after the Reporting Web Conference?
A: The Reporting Web Conference web page contains all the slides, recordings, and Q&A's from all past RWCs. The direct URL is: http://www.csrees.usda.gov/about/strat_plan_web.html. This particular RWC has also been modified into a **FY2012 Plan of Work 101 Training** Presentation and posted on the main AREERA web page under "Training Tools and Information for Users."